

Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn As a Way of Life in Pioneer America

ISSN 0003-4827

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Recommended Citation

"Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn As a Way of Life in Pioneer America." *The Annals of Iowa* 46 (1983), 550-551.

Available at: <https://doi.org/10.17077/0003-4827.8921>

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him to build a haven for Negro self-development. After this last disillusioning rejection, Waller died a bitter idealist, a lifelong victim of bigotry and ill fortune.

Author Randall Woods, whose past scholarship has focused on diplomatic history, informs his readers that the book's intent is to focus on Waller's career, rather than to inquire into race relations at the turn of the century. This is one of the few disappointments of the book, for Woods provides deft analysis in places: his description of the effect of racism on United States diplomatic motives is a case in point. Woods also has a keen sense of irony and is able judiciously to fit events in Waller's life into general historical patterns. More insights and interpretations could have made the book more important than it already is. Aided by good source material and a relatively unscathed topic, the book could have become a rich, provocative work, especially concerning black leadership in the Midwest.

Nonetheless, *A Black Odyssey* is a solid work of scholarship. It adds to the small body of historical works concerning the American Negro. Woods's work should contribute to the elaboration of a more definitive and focused view of Negro leadership and black/white relations at the turn of the century. Its statement reaches far beyond the Kansas prairie borders.

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Shucks, Shocks, and Hominy Blocks: Corn as a Way of Life in Pioneer America, by Nicholas P. Hardeman. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1981. pp. xxi, 271. Drawings, bibliography, index. \$20.00.

The author, professor of history at California State University at Long Beach, offers a nostalgic though interesting book about the production and uses of corn in the days before "America was devoid of its once-large class of self-reliant small farmers and farm families" (p. 248). Hardeman is interested in the "truer meaning of [raising] corn as a way of life" (p. 249). The author spent twenty years on "a rather primitive Ozark corn farm" and has done research on the history of his family on the nineteenth-century frontier. He is clearly steeped in the evidence for the significance of corn to pioneer America as well as the twentieth century. Because of the significance of corn to the economy, this is a book of interest to many academics as well as non-academics in the Middle West.

The work is divided into eighteen chapters—each focused on

some aspect of raising corn or of its social and economic significance such as: origins of corn, colonial uses, preparation for planting, techniques of cultivation, food uses, enemies of corn, etc. In each case the emphasis is upon the actions of people in dealing with corn—the social organization that accompanied agriculture. There is a wealth of detailed information—lore—about how people did what.

The title implies the book covers from 1607 on, but most of the material and evidence concerns the first half of the nineteenth century and the region historians would call the border states—Virginia, Kentucky, Tennessee, Arkansas, Missouri—the areas most familiar to the author from his family history research.

One can certainly get a fuller sense of the significance of corn for the American economy and social organization past and present from this book, but some may find the style annoying. Corn is personified, the writing is a sort of breathless gee-whiz style. Many customs associated with rural life are attributed to the presence of corn even though they could have developed with any other pioneer grain-based agriculture. For example, the author makes much of the fact that the labor requirements for corn tied the family together as a unit—many kinds of agriculture could do that. Thus it seems he unnecessarily overstates his case. He wants to claim all rural virtues of work came from raising corn. There are no notes, but there is an extensive bibliography. The book is rich in detail which on occasion seems miscellaneous. It was clearly a labor of love for the author and one can get a clear sense of how a system of agriculture has social significance far beyond just a way to make a buck. This is an interesting and useful book for historians but also in part for social scientists and engineers who ought to be concerned about the social consequences of current agricultural change and development. Some review of the social consequences of agriculture in the past can be an enlightening comparison.

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Feeding Multitudes: A History of How Farmers Made America Rich, by Wheeler McMillen. Danville, Illinois: Interstate Printers and Publishers, 1981. pp. xviii, 491. Appendixes. \$12.00 paper.

Agricultural economists use the phrase "farm fundamentalism" to describe farmers' beliefs that their enterprise is basic to economic welfare and that their character is superior through agrarian simplicity. Wheeler McMillen, who presents *Feeding Multitudes* as "a fairly

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